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ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for increasing literacy skills in kindergarten students. The targeted population consisted of kindergarten students from two schools in a growing unit district located in a northwest suburb of Chicago, Illinois. The lack of literacy skills was documented through student assessment and teacher observation. Analysis of probable cause data revealed that students reported a lack of literacy skills that were affecting their reading and writing. Teachers reported low oral language skills. Reviews of curricula content and instruction strategies revealed a need for more oral language activities and not enough parental involvement in each student's learning. A review of solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in two major categories of intervention: increased oral language activities in the classroom, and increased parental involvement. Post intervention data indicated an increase in the students' oral language skills, which resulted in increased literacy skills. Contains 31 references, and 8 tables and 8 figures of data. Appendixes contain a home-school literacy questionnaire; off-task behavior checklist; parental reading strategies; and a Parent Reading Night invitation. (Author/RS)

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INCREASING LITERACY SKILLS IN KINDERGARTEN STUDENTS

Michelle Dawson
Carol Schnulle

An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the

School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the

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ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for increasing literacy skills in kindergarten students. The targeted population consisted of kindergarten students from two schools in a growing unit district located in a northwest suburb of Chicago, Illinois. The lack of literacy skills was documented through student assessment and teacher observation.

Analysis of probable cause data revealed that students reported a lack of literacy skills that were affecting their reading and writing. Teachers reported low oral language skills. Reviews of curricula content and instruction strategies revealed a need for more oral language activities and not enough parental involvement in each students' learning.

A review of solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in two major categories of intervention: increased oral language activities in the classroom, and increased parental involvement.

Post intervention data indicated an increase in the students' oral language skills, which resulted in increased literacy skills.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

The students of the targeted kindergarten classes exhibited delayed literacy skills that interfered with their academic growth. Evidence for the existence of the problem included anecdotal records taken during shared reading experiences, assessment of letter recognition and print concepts and tracking reading levels through running records.

Immediate Problem Context

The two schools being studied were in a unit district located in a northwest suburb of Chicago, Illinois. Both schools were elementary schools (K-6). School A had an enrollment of 450 students. The ethnic characteristics of the school were 53.3% White, 5.8% Black, 20.4% Hispanic and 20.4% Asian/Pacific Islander. The student population was composed of 30.7% low-income and 29.8% limited-English-proficient families. The school had an attendance rate of 95.2%. This was defined as the number of students who attended school every day. A mobility rate is based on the number of students who enroll in or leave a school during the school year. The mobility rate of School A was 25.1%. Chronic truants are students who were absent from school

without valid cause 18 or more of the last 180 school days. The chronic truancy rate was 2.1% (School Report Card, 2000).

School B had an enrollment of 368 students. The ethnic characteristics of the school were 35.9% White, 13.6% Black, 40.2% Hispanic, 9.8% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.5% Native American. The student population was composed of 54.6% low-income and 28.3% limited-English-proficient families. The school had an attendance rate of 93.3%, a mobility rate of 47.5%, and a chronic truancy rate of 1.3% (School Report Card, 2000).

The school district employed 2,644 teachers and 794 support staff. Of all school personnel, 77.7% were female and 22.3% were male. The racial/ethnic make up consisted of 87.8% White, 2.4% Black, 9.0% Hispanic, 0.7% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.1% Native American. Average teaching experience in the district was 14.3 years. Fifty-four percent of teachers possessed a bachelor's degree and 47.5% held masters degrees and higher degrees. The pupil-teacher ratio at the elementary level was 20.1:1, and pupil -certified staff ratio was 14.6:1 (School Report Card, 2000).

School A had 26 teachers and 12 support staff. The teaching staff was comprised of 14 regular education teachers, 2 special education teachers, 5 English as a second language teachers, 1 school psychologist, 1 nurse, 1 technical support staff, 1 speech and language therapist, 1 social worker, 1 reading resource teacher, 1 learning center staff, 1 physical education teacher, 1 music teacher, 1 art teacher and 5 assistants (District website, 2000).

School B had 26 teachers and 13 support staff. The teaching staff consisted of 11 regular education teachers, 3 bilingual teachers, 4 reading support specialists, 1 learning disability teacher, 1 behavior development teacher, 1 exceptional needs teacher, 1 speech and language therapist, 2 part time physical education teachers, 2 part time art teachers, 2 part time music teachers, 8 assistants, and 3 nurses (School Staff Directory, 2000).

The district believed, as stated in the Mission and Goals of Elementary Reading Statement, that:

> Reading is essential. It is the process by which people gain information and ideas from books, newspapers, manuals, letters, contracts, advertisements, and a host of other materials. Using strategies for constructing meaning before, during and after reading will help students connect what they read now with what they have learned in the past. Students who read well and widely build a strong foundation for learning in all areas of life (District website, 2000).

Reading scores in the district reflected a growing concern for building a strong foundation for learning. At the third grade level, 34% of students were below district reading standards and 6% were at an academic warning level. At the fifth grade level, 44% of students were below district standards with 0% at an academic warning level (School Report Card, 2000). In reference to the Mission and Goals of Elementary Reading statement:

> All district elementary teachers implement First Steps Reading

Developmental Continuum. The reading continuum provides teachers a way of looking at what children can actually do and how they can do it, in order to inform planning for further development. The primary purpose is to link assessment to teaching (District website, 2000).

The Surrounding Community

The school district was the second largest district in Illinois, serving over 36,000 students from 11 communities in Chicago's northwest suburbs. The district had 49 schools, 38 elementary, 7 middle schools, and 4 high schools (District website, 2000). The district employed 105 school-based administrators, 26 supervisors/directors, 31 central support administrators, 27 high school divisionals, and 9 superintendent/executive staff. The student profile of the district was 56.68% White, 29.19% Hispanic, 7.46% African American, 6.56% Asian-American, and 0.11% Native American (School Report Card, 2000).

The city covered approximately 24 square miles and was located in two counties. The 1996 special population census reported the population to be 85,068. The city was located in the growing region northwest of Chicago. There had been substantial residential, commercial and industrial growth. The Northern Illinois Planning Commission projected the city's population to increase to 100,000 by the year 2010 (City website, 2000). The median household income for the county was $50,747 (Tribal Data Resources, 2000). In 1996 the school district began a five year $172 million construction program. This program promised structural improvements to every school in the district and the building of five new schools by the year 2000. This was

believed to be the largest construction initiative in Illinois public school history (City website, 2000).

The district had academy programs designed to take high school students to new levels of creative interdisciplinary learning, and give them a head start on higher education. One program was housed in every high school. The programs were; Gifted/Talented Academy, Science/Engineering/High Technology Academy, Visual and Performing Arts Academy, and World Languages and International Studies Academy (City website, 2000).

The district was supported through a variety of community involvement activities. These activities included parent groups, school councils, volunteers, partnerships (i.e. business, civic and service organizations and other community entities), a citizen's advisory council, and special interest advisory councils. The tax rate for the community was 5.4975 (this is an average of the three counties that the district is in). The last referendum in March 2000 was overwhelmingly approved with 70% voter approval. The 2000-2001 school year brought the seventh consecutive balanced budget for the district. The district was able to gain funds easily. However, with explosive growth, the district has already started aggressively seeking grants and other outside funds to maintain the balanced budget (District Annual Report, 2001).

National Context of the Problem

The problem of low reading skills has generated concern at the national level, as addressed by the United States Secretary of Education Richard Riley. In this report he stated: "teaching our children good reading habits is our most urgent task. Our first

challenge is to get America reading again" (p.1). Low reading abilities have led to other areas of concern. " A young person who cannot read is placed at an extraordinary disadvantage. And in far too many cases, these are the very young people who start down the road to truancy, giving up and eventually dropping out" (Riley Touts National Reading, Writing Partnership as Reading Report Card is Issued, 1996, p.1).

The National Center of Education reported that we were falling far short of the Goals 2000 quest to teach all children to read adequately by the end of the third grade (Mathes & Torgenson, 1998). Forty percent of the U.S. population had reading problems severe enough to hinder their enjoyment of reading (Good, Simmons & Smith, 1998). As the demands for literacy in the United States rose each year, the difficulties we experienced in teaching all children to read have become increasingly critical (Mathes & Trogenson, 1998).

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) administered the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading assessment to a national sample of students in grades four, eight, and twelve. The NAEP assessment included reading material that represented three different purposes for reading: reading for literary experience, reading to gain information, and reading to perform a task. In 1998, at the fourth grade level, 38% of students were at a below basic level, 62% were at or above basic level, 31% were at or above proficient, and 7% were at an advanced level. At the eighth grade level, 26% were below basic, 74% were at or above basic, 33% were at or above proficient, and 3% were at an advanced level. Grade 12 students had 23%

below basic, 77% at or above basic, 40% at or above proficient, and 6% were at an advanced level (Donahue, Voelkl, Capbell & Mazzeo, 1999).

Although reading instruction is done differently than it was a decade ago, there have been few changes in terms of outcome. Many students continue to do well. Worldwide the United States ranked second to Finland on fourth grade reading achievement on narrative text in 1992. However, at least 20% of children experience significant difficulties learning to read. Over 40% of fourth and eighth grade students performed below grade level (Mathes & Torgeson, 1998).

The report card of state by state reading scores for 1998 released by the United States Department of Education shows that students on average are reading somewhat better than four years ago. However, these improvements only showed a return to the performance levels of 1992 (Lord, 1999).

It has been shown that children learn literacy skills before they enter school. These skills do not develop on their own; rather, instruction shapes them. School districts, state agencies, and national organizations have set standards to support early literacy (Bodrova, Leong & Paynter, 1999). Forty-two states spent $1.7 billion on pre-kindergarten programs in the 1998-1999 school year. Research shows that pre-kindergarten programs can have a positive influence on educational performance, especially among students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Walsh, 1999).

With increasing need for improved reading instruction at all grade levels, the fields of reading education and early childhood education share more similarities than

differences. By addressing these needs at an early age, we can have a positive impact on the education of young learners as beginning readers (Quick,1998).

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

In order to document the extent of low literacy skills of the targeted kindergarten classes, oral language, letter identification, known words in reading, concepts about print, writing vocabulary, hearing sounds in words, and reading levels were assessed. Students' reading behaviors were observed and a questionnaire was given to the parents.

The first method of assessment was a home-school questionnaire. This survey asked families to evaluate how much time was spent on parent/child literacy activities in the home. The survey went out to the 24 students from the targeted kindergarten classes (12 from school A and 12 from school B). (Appendix A)

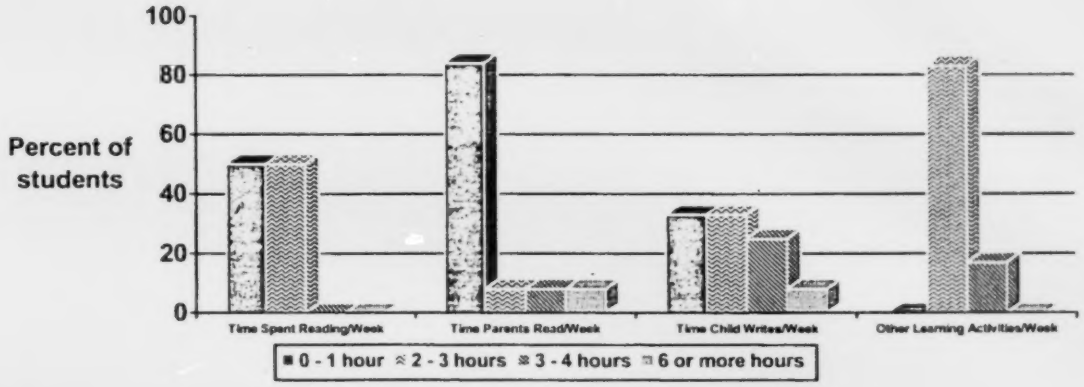

Figure 1. Parent questionnaire of family literacy behaviors School A, January 2002

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All 12 surveys from school A were returned. As shown in Figure 1, 50% of the families spent zero to one hour a week reading with their child and 50% spent two to three hours a week reading with their child. The types of stories most enjoyed reading were fairy tales, and fiction. Ninety-two percent of families said they discussed and asked questions while reading the story while eight percent reported they did not.

When questioned about how often they visited the library, 58% responded they visited the library zero to one time per month. Forty-two percent responded they visited the library two to three times per month.

Modeling reading is seen as an important aspect of fostering good reading habits. Eighty-four percent of parents responded they spent between zero and three hours reading in front of their children. Eight percent responded they spent four to five hours reading. Eight percent spent six or more hours modeling good reading habits. Parents stated that reading for enjoyment or to learn necessary information were the most important reasons they read.

Developing literacy skills takes place not only through reading, but writing as well. Sixty-six percent of parents answered that their child spent zero to three hours on writing activities each week, twenty-five percent spent four to five hours on writing activities and eight percent spent six or more hours per week on writing activities.

Literacy skills can also be developed through other learning activities such as computer activities, games, math activities, puzzles and coloring. Eighty-three percent of families spent two to three hours on other learning activities and seventeen percent spent four to five hours on these activities.

While modeling good reading habits is important, allowing children to explore books on their own can be beneficial as well. Fifty percent of the parents stated that their child spent zero to fifteen minutes per day looking at books, magazines or any printed material when alone. Forty-two percent stated their child spent 15 to 30 minutes per day reading, and eight percent spent 30 to 45 minutes a day doing individual reading.

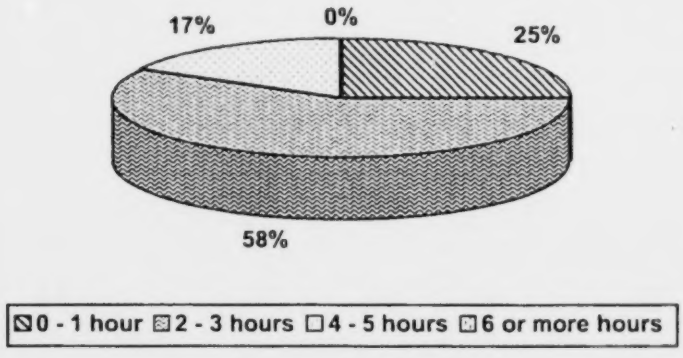

Figure 2. Students' average television viewing per day, School A, January 2002

As shown in Figure 2, families in school A evaluated their television viewing habits, 25% reported their child watched television zero to one hour daily, 58% watched two to three hours of television daily and 17% watched four to five hours of television a day.

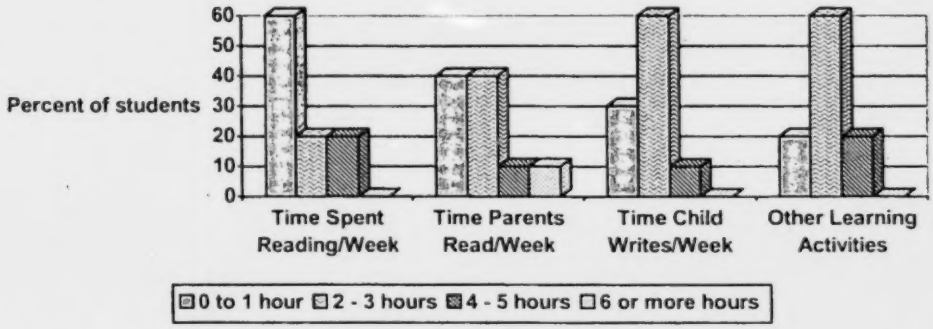

Figure 3. Parent questionnaire of family literacy behaviors School B, January 2002

Parents at School B returned 83% of the surveys. Figure 3 shows that 60% of the families spent zero to one hour a week reading at home with their child, 20% spent two to three hours reading and 20% spent four to five hours reading at home with their child. None of the families spent more than five hours reading at home per week. Most of the families responded that they enjoyed reading fairy tales together. The second type of story most read was fiction followed by non-fiction. When questioned whether or not they discussed the stories with their child while reading 90% responded yes and 10% responded no.

When responding to the number of times they visited the library with their child, 70% of parents reported they visited the library zero to one time per month and 30% said they visited the library two to three times per month. None of the families visited the library more than three times per month.

When questioned about their own reading habits, the adults reported that 40% spent zero to one hour per week modeling good reading habits, 40% spent two to three

hours per week, 10% spent four to five hours reading and 10% spent six or more hours modeling good reading behaviors. Most of the adults stated they spent their time learning necessary information, reading for enjoyment and for employment.

When asked what other types of learning activities take place in the home, the two activities families spent the most time on were puzzles and coloring followed by games, math activities, and computers. Twenty percent reported spending zero to one hour per seek on these activities, 60% spent two to three hours and 20% spent four to five hours on learning activities

Finally, when families were questioned about how much time their child spent reading alone, 10% stated that their child spent 0 to 15 minutes per day reading alone. Eighty percent spent 15 to 20 minutes per day reading, and 10% reported that their child spent 60 minutes or more per day reading alone.

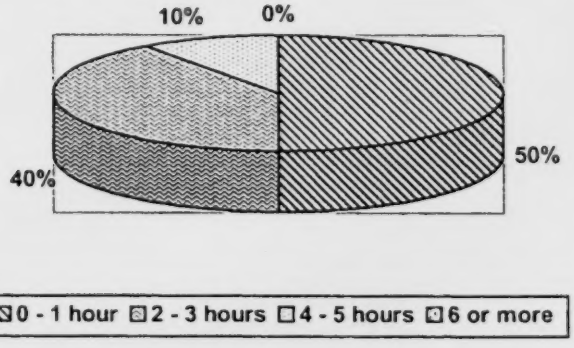

Figure 4. Students' average television viewing per day, School B, January 2002

Figure 4 shows students' television viewing habits, 50% of parents responded that their child watched zero to one hour of television a day, 40% reported watching two to three hours per day and 10% reported watching four to five hours per day.

Students were administered the Observational Survey by Marie Clay (1993) to assess letter identification, words known in reading, concepts about print, known words in writing, hearing sounds in words, and reading level.

Table 1

Observational Survey School A, January 2002

Student	Letter Identification	Word Test	Concepts About Print	Writing Vocabulary	Dictation	Reading Level
1	49	0	13	15	9	2
2	42	0	11	7	6	1
3	1	0	5	1	0	A
4	45	0	7	5	2	1
5	53	1	15	14	15	1
6	30	0	13	5	2	B
7	18	0	10	4	1	1
8	53	3	10	14	20	B
9	49	0	13	8	5	B
10	50	1	14	18	6	B
11	28	0	10	7	1	1
12	53	1	12	10	16	1
Average	39.25	0.5	11.08	9	6.92	

The results of the Observational Survey administered to the students at school A, as shown in Table 1 were as follows. The average number of letters known by students was 39. The average number of words students recognized on the word test was 0.5 out of a possible 20. On average, students only understood 11 out of 24 concepts relating to print. When asked to write all the words they knew, students only wrote an

average of 9 words during the 10 minutes allowed. The average number of sounds students heard in words during dictation was 7 out of a possible 37. Reading levels were also shown to be low, with one student scoring at the lowest level A and four students scoring at level B. Six students scored at level one, and only one student scored at level two.

Table 2

Observational Survey School B January, 2002

Student	Letter Identification	Word Test	Concepts About Print	Writing Vocabulary	Dictation	Reading Level
13	17	0	9	2	0	A
14	47	0	14	9	5	A
15	52	3	14	16	15	A
16	52	6	15	29	22	3
17	17	0	6	3	1	A
18	45	0	10	7	6	A
19	45	0	14	7	8	A
20	41	0	7	10	2	A
21	43	0	10	3	5	A
22	50	0	11	7	3	A
23	50	0	9	4	9	A
24	51	3	14	17	21	2
Average	42.5	1	11.08	9.5	8.08	

The results of the Observational Survey administered to the students at school B, as shown in Table 2, were as follows. The average number of letters known by students was 43. The average number of words recognized by students on the word test was one out of 20. On average, students understood 11 out of 24 concepts relating to print. When asked to write all the words they knew, students only wrote an average of 10 words during the 10 minutes allowed. The average number of sounds students heard in words during dictation was 8 out of a possible 37. Reading levels were shown

to be extremely low with 10 students scoring at the lowest level A, 1 student scoring at level two and 1 student at level three.

The third method of assessment looked at the written and spoken language structures students were able to successfully handle. All students were administered the Record of Oral Language test by Marie Clay (1983).

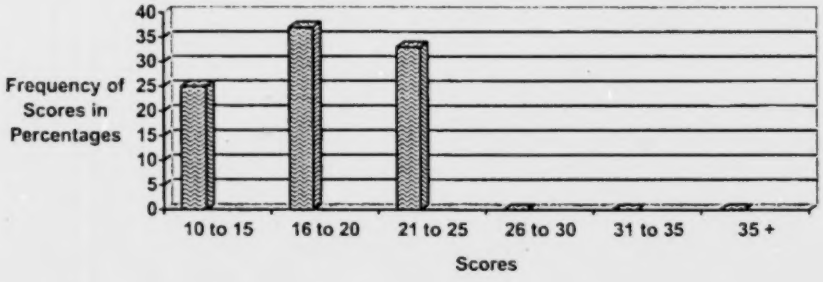

Figure 5. Record of Oral Language Test School A, January 2002

Figure 5 shows that in school A, 25% of students received a score between 10 and 15, which is at the warning level. Thirty-seven percent of students received a score between 16 and 20. Thirty-three percent scored between 21 and 25. There were no scores between 26 and 30. Four percent scored between 31 and 35. There were no scores of 35 or higher.

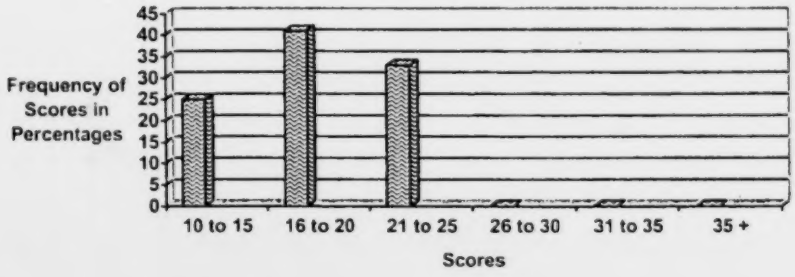

Figure 6. Record of Oral Language Test School B, January 2002

Figure 6 shows that at school B, 25% of students received a score between 10 and 15, which is at the warning level. Forty-one percent received a score between 16 and 20. Thirty-three percent scored between 21 and 25. No one received a score higher than 25.

The final method of assessment was the observation of reading behaviors. This showed the frequency of students performing off-task behaviors during a 10-minute independent reading period. The behaviors documented were; walking around the room, talking to other children, and not reading their books. (Appendix B)

Table 3

Observation of Off Task Behaviors School A, January 22, 2002

Behavior Category	Number of Incidents
Walking around the room	2
Talking to other children	18
Not looking at their books	23

Table 3 shows that the students at school A exhibited the behavior of walking around the room two times. They were observed talking to other children 18 times and not looking at their books 23 times.

Table 4

Observation of Off Task Reading Behaviors School B, January 22, 20002

Behavior Category	Number of Incidents
Walking around the room	9
Talking to other children	21
Not looking at their books	23

Table 4 shows that the students at school B exhibited the behavior of walking around the room nine times. They were observed talking to other children 21 times and not looking at their books 23 times.

The data collected documented the need for extra literacy support both in the home and at school. The Parent Questionnaire showed how little time parents spent with their child on literacy activities. The Observational Survey and Record of Oral Language scores were extremely low, especially since the testing took place mid-year. The Observation of Off Task Behaviors during Independent Reading recorded students' disinterest with reading tasks.

Probable Causes

Literature suggests several reasons why students are entering kindergarten with low literacy skills. These include the students' language and culture, parent/guardian income, family structure, education level of parents, home environment, parent/family

involvement in home and in school, experiences children receive in preschool, and home/school misconceptions.

The first area of concern addressed is differences in language and culture. Many children who live in a home where English is not the main language spoken often are at a disadvantage when they enter school. When communication between home and school is difficult, conflict may arise between parents and educators. This situation leaves the child in a difficult position of completing homework assignments in English. Parents become frustrated because they are not able to understand the assignment and educators are frustrated because the assignment is not completed correctly or is not done at all (Anderson, 2000).

Literacy is often times believed to be a social practice or a way of life. Social constructionists argue that language and learning is embedded in families and communities rather than in universal stages of child development and growth (Makin, 2000). Many families, communities, and social groups do not place as much value on literacy and social practices as educators. Children are taught what to say, how, when, and to whom to say things through their own practices.

Parent or Guardian income has also been found to be a cause for low literacy skills in children. Anderson (2000) reported that:

> Forty percent of our nation's children are at risk for academic failure. Poverty is one of the variables associated with academic failure. Children from working class families generally performed at below average levels in reading tests than did children from families with

> a higher socioeconomic status. They are more frequently targeted for assistance in reading. Socioeconomic status has consistently been related to school success (p.4).

Children who come from lower income families are at a higher risk for reading difficulties, delays in language development, delays in the development of letter knowledge and phonological sensitivity when compared to higher income families (Lonigan, 1999).

Beaston (2000) identifies several possible areas that account for differences in the educational activities between upper and lower socio-economic families. Families from upper economic classes had an easier time assisting their child with assignments and work. They also felt more confident about their relationship with their child's teacher and other school personnel. Upper economic class families were also able to offer more material resources for their child, which helped in facilitating family-school relationships. They also tended to communicate more with other families and parents within the school community.

Single-parent homes are a growing problem in our nation. In 1990, 50% of children in the United States lived with one parent. One-half of the single-parent problems in school are due to economic deprivation. Children who come from single-parent homes are more likely to repeat grades more often, drop out of school earlier, and get lower marks across the board than do children from two-parent homes (Anderson, 2000).

A child's success in school has also been linked with their parents' educational level. Anderson (2000) reported that:

> Children, whose parents lacked a high school diploma, were twice as likely to live in poverty than were children whose parents were high school graduates. They were seven and one half times more likely to live in poverty than children whose parents received more than a high school education. Thus, children of low-income homes are more likely to do poorly in school and are less likely to graduate (p.5).

Parents" attitudes about school play a role in their child's attitude. Anderson (2000) believes that the home environment has more influence on school related achievement than school related factors do. Homes that provide stimulating cultural and language experiences are often homes that are "psychologically comfortable". It is in these environments where positive attitudes towards reading and writing are fostered (Beaston, 2000).

Children who come from homes where there is conflict or inconsistencies in their lives tend to have negative forces working towards their achievement (Anderson, 2000). When children come to school with different literacy backgrounds, they are affected in different ways. The child, who has encountered reading and writing activities at home will extend the learning and development that has already taken place at home. However, the child who has not had any literacy experiences at home will experience discontinuity between home and school practices that will seriously affect his performance in school (Neuman, 2000).

While parents can not only influence their child's attitude towards school, they can also impact their child's success in school based on how involved they are in their child's educational experiences. Family involvement can encompass a wide variety of interactions with their child from providing reading and writing materials to modeling reading and writing for their children and providing direct instruction or casual informal assistance. Because of this range, some children will be better prepared for literacy instruction than others (Neuman, 2000). "Extensive research tells us that parental involvement significantly increases the development and achievement of children" (Anderson, 2000, p.1).

One of the goals presented in the U.S. Department of Education's Goals 2000: Educate America is the formation of partnerships with parents (Barbour, 1999 p.1) Parent involvement plays an important role in children's cognitive growth and academic success. Children whose parents have high expectations of them have been exposed to books and academic games. Their parents have acted as role models by reading to them, in front of them, and have visited the library (Anderson, 2000).

Parental involvement within schools also has an effect on students' achievement. Children demonstrate higher levels of achievement when their parents attend school meetings, conferences, and interact with school personnel when compared to children whose parents do not interact in their child's school (Anderson, 2000). Anderson (2000) goes on to state that parents who experienced learning problems many times developed a negative association with school and are usually less involved in school activities.

The preschool years have proven to be crucial in a child's literacy development. Parents, preschool programs, daycare, and kindergarten programs need to expose children to knowledge about letters, sounds, print, pictures, words, and sentences. These skills require instruction in order to be developed. A child's knowledge in these areas will be increased through instruction and experience (Bodrova, 1999).

In order for children to attain high reading and writing levels they need to see adults model reading and writing. Preschool programs can provide exposure to these important literacy skills that may not be modeled in the home (Nel, 2000). Children can be limited in attaining high reading and writing levels when they don't have the literacy experiences they need during the preschool years (Nel, 2000).

Teachers and parents must work toward common goals if children are going to be successful in school. Because methods of instruction and classroom practices are ever changing, parents are often confused on how they can best help their children. Often they are only familiar with traditional reading and writing approaches that stress phonics instruction. They struggle to teach their children to read "perfectly", and focus only on getting the right answer. "Unfortunately, these are approaches that have been identified as those that make learning to read and write more difficult for children, and the process of helping is undermined by ineffective practices, frustration and wasted time" (Douville, 2000, p.1). Teachers must provide parents with information on strategies to use at home that will supplement what the children are learning in school.

Research shows that the lack of literacy skills at the kindergarten level is not only a local problem but a national one as well. Teachers are challenged to meet the ever-

changing needs of a diverse student population. Then they must look for solutions and teaching strategies that will best meet the needs of their students. This cannot be a one-sided effort on the part of schools, parents and families must also do their part in helping with the education of their children.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

Many people and institutions offer a variety of possible solutions to help with the ever-growing problem of low literacy skills exhibited in kindergarten students. Increased parental/family involvement, preschool programs/early interventions, school curriculum, and early literacy standards are a few of the areas that can be addressed when attempting to increase children's literacy skills.

A child's home environment can set the stage for his/her academic success. Parental involvement plays an important role in children's attitudes towards school. Anderson (2000) defines parental involvement as "any interaction between a parent and a child that may contribute to the child's development or direct parent participation with a child's school in the interest of the child" (p.1). Barbour (1999) stated "family involvement should not be limited to volunteering at school or attending school-sponsored events. This broad view of involvement affirms the parent's role as the child's primary teacher, and the home as the child's first classroom" (p.1).

Parents reading to children, as described by Anderson (2000), is the best known, most recommended parental practice that is related to positive attitudes and reading achievement. This is further supported by the 1985 Commission on Reading Report, Becoming a Nation of Readers which states "the single most important home activity for

building knowledge required for success in reading is reading aloud to children" (Anderson, 2000, p.4). Parents promote positive attitudes towards reading and reading achievement when they read to their children regularly (Barbour, 1999). In home environments where storybooks are read frequently, children learn about the functions of written language and gain information about reading skills and processes (Barbour, 1999).

When adults model positive reading behavior, children see reading as an enjoyable activity. Modeling can be achieved when parents read the newspaper, magazines or books to themselves while their child is awake. Anderson (2000) describes that when children have a model of a fluent reader it provides a stimulus for the child and establishes closeness. The home literacy practices of family members seem to establish the most significant relation to the student's reading attitude (Beaston, 2000).

Families must work to create special literacy events within their busy lives. It may seem impossible to add one more thing to an already overflowing lifestyle, but it can be achieved very easily. Beaston wrote:

> Cooking together, making shopping lists, discussing current events from the newspaper or magazines, helping with homework, writing letters or leaving notes, providing home libraries with high interest books, establishing a controlled TV time, and having informal family book talks are a few events that can enhance family literacy without interrupting the already full schedule many families maintain (2000, p.2).

Another way for parents to encourage literacy at home is to use the Language Experience Approach. This approach, as described by Douville, (2000) begins with a discussion of an actual or pretend experience such as a trip to the grocery store, a special pet, or a response to a shared storybook. As the child's ideas emerge, the parent writes them down on paper or word-processes them on a computer. When parents make a point to do these activities, children see themselves as readers and writers and begin to recognize a connection between written and spoken language.

An understanding has evolved that schools alone cannot be the sole providers of literacy activities for children, because becoming a truly literate adult has many facets including motivation, interest, opportunity and value. Clearly, parents as their children's first teachers have an enormous influence on securing a solid literacy value system, and therefore should share the responsibility to support their children's literacy experiences (Beaston, 2000).

With the busy lifestyles that both two parent and single parent families face, many are looking for alternatives and help outside the home. Preschool programs and early intervention are two of these alternatives offered to families. While preschool academics do not involve formal reading instruction, they promote print awareness by exposing young children to letters, words, and numbers in meaningful contexts (Nel, 2000). Godt, Hutinger and Robinson (1999) suggested that quality preschool programs should provide developmentally appropriate activities that support learning new tasks including emergent literacy tasks in motivating naturally occurring situations. Even before a child begins school, the literacy skills they encounter enhance their reading skill

development during the elementary school years. A primary goal of early childhood education is the development of strong literacy skills (Anderson, 2000).

If a child does not enter school with a solid foundation, built either in the home environment or with quality preschool programs, then intervention is required at an early age. As stated by Good (1998), early intervention requires accurate identification of children at risk for reading failure. Rather than waiting for children to qualify for special services, Mathes (1998) believed that risk should be assessed on entry into school and intervention begun before failure has occurred. He further stated "that once identified, at-risk students require intensive, explicit and scaffolded small-group or tutorial instruction prior to (if possible) or at the beginning of first grade" (p.2). At-risk students require programs whose curriculum directly addresses their literacy needs. These programs include intensive instruction on the acquisition of accurate and quick word recognition skills, speed and ease of reading in connected text, extensive engagement with authentic literature, and strategies for enhancing the deep processing of text (Mathes, 1998).

In obtaining a positive appreciation for reading, "Every teacher knows that the recipe for a successful education has many ingredients" (Riley,1997). How teachers go about providing reading instruction is varied and can be carried out through a variety of curriculum approaches. The first, whole language/constructivist approach, puts learners in the role of active participants. Quick (1998) described whole language as:

> A philosophy or approach that typically includes the use of real literature and writing in context of meaningful, functional, and

> cooperative experiences to develop students' motivation and interest in learning. First, language (oral and written) is used for authentic purposes. Second, children will learn language best if it is learned for authentic purposes. Third, child-centered learning is preferable to teacher-centered learning. Finally, empowering children and teachers is important (p.4)

Teachers who use this approach expect children to build on their prior knowledge and use this knowledge to interpret new information to become responsible readers (Freppon, 1999). Students become responsible readers by: reading meaningful content, learning to recognize words in context, receiving word recognition reinforcement through re-reading and echoic reading of previously read content, observing the teacher reading aloud, cooperative reading with the teacher, and through independent practice (Ediger, 2001). Phonemic awareness, the awareness of sounds within our language is a part of whole language instruction. Reiner (1998) stated that phonemic awareness could be developed through various activities such as language play, word play, listening to rhymes, songs, and poetry, and engaging in shared reading of predictable literature.

The student is at the center of the whole language/constructivist approach and his/her interests and needs guide instruction. Rather than being drilled on phonics in isolation, students read meaningful content and attach interest to what is being read in a story. Students learn to recognize words in context, not in isolation, and they receive reinforcement in word recognition through re-reading and echoic reading or previously

read content. Students also observe the teacher reading aloud, work in cooperative groups reading with the teacher, and then have time to read on their own (Ediger, 2001). In the whole language classroom "as you move steadily towards increased flexibility, classroom work comes to depend less on chapters in textbooks and pages in workbooks and more on classroom literature and on the students' own reading, writing and interests (Hinchey, 1999, p.1).

Play has always been an important part of the preschool curriculum. In whole language/constructivist classrooms, researchers have explored the relationship between dramatic play and literacy development. (Einarsdottir, 1996) The language children use when they play needs to be developed and extended. Einarsdotti found that the skills used in higher modes of play were also needed for reading and writing (1996). He went on to state:

> Children use the same process when using symbols in play as they do in reading, indicating that children practice using symbols and abstract thought during play. Children have to be able to use symbols in play if they are to use and understand them in reading (p.1).

Advocates of phonics-based instruction believe that students need tools in learning to recognize words. Phonics can be a key to recognizing unknown words (Ediger, 2001). Many times phonics is thought of as dull and boring worksheets and skill and drill instruction, but it can be more than that. It can be used along with whole word methods in reading instruction, and provides security to learners in becoming independent in word identification (Ediger, 2001). "Although it will not be a 100 percent

consistent way to identify unknown words due to irregularities in spelling of English words," Ediger stated, "there is adequate consistency to warrant its attention in reading instruction" (2001, p.2)

While not every curriculum method is without flaw, teachers who use phonics based instruction believe it can be used " to assist a student to identify unknown words, in a very systematic approach if a learner can benefit from phonics to recognize unknown words and in an informal way to make these learnings enjoyable" (Ediger, 2001, p.2). Ediger also stresses that workbook pages should only be used in phonics if they serve a useful purpose, which is to guide students to become independent in word recognition (2001, p.3).

A balanced literacy approach has been developed and is being used in many of today's classrooms. Many advocates believe that when you blend the best it will help every child reach his or her full potential (Quick, 1998). The definition of the balanced literacy approach according to Quick (1998) was:

> one that combines the language and literature-rich activities associated with whole language aimed at enhancing meaning, understanding, and the love of language with explicit teaching of the skills needed to develop fluency with print, including the automatic recognition of a growing number of words and the ability to decode new words (p.5).

Researchers have been in an ongoing struggle to find the instructional approaches that will best facilitate student's learning to read and write. Cantrell (1999)

found that some of those practices included engaging children in frequent reading and writing of extended text, exposing them to high quality children's literature and explicitly teaching skills within reading and writing. Furthermore, Wharton-McDonald (1997) stated: "highly effective teachers reported using both immersion in authentic literacy-related experiences and explicit teaching through modeling, explanation, and mini-lesson re-explanations, especially with respect to decoding and other skills such as punctuation, mechanics and comprehension strategies" (p.2).

The major benefit of a balanced literacy approach is that it can reach the learning styles of more students. Quick noted that phonics requires strong auditory and analytic reading styles and whole language supports visual, tactile, and global reading styles (1998, p.5). Another benefit of this approach is that "highly effective teachers were able to integrate multiple goals into single lessons and could weave together strands from different lessons to form coherent, meaningful patterns of instruction (Wharton-McDonald, 1997, p.2). Teachers who are successful at teaching their students to read and write are able to take the best instructional approaches and fit them to best meet their diverse students' needs.

With the increasing pressure that schools and administrators are facing for higher test scores, some districts and researchers advocate literacy standards being implemented in preschool and kindergarten. The California Department of Education in 1995 stated: every school and district must organize and implement a comprehensive and balanced reading program that is researched based and combines skills development with literature and language-rich activities. According to Bodrova (1999),

early literacy standards can be implemented in the early childhood classroom while maintaining a developmentally appropriate curriculum. Furthermore, teachers must use instructional strategies specifically designed for young children if they are to be successful in early literacy instruction. School districts, state agencies, and national organizations believe that if early literacy standards are set, then accountability for teaching literacy in early childhood classrooms will grow stronger (Bodrova, 1999).

Project Objectives and Processes

As a result of increased instructional emphasis on literacy skills, during the period of January 22, 2002 to April 5, 2002, the kindergarten students from the targeted program will increase their literacy skills, as measured by Mari Clay's Observational Survey (1993).

In order to accomplish the project objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. Develop oral language activities, both whole group and small group.
2. Develop a letter for parents that will give suggestions on reading strategies for parents to do with their child at home.
3. Plan a parent reading night where parents will have the opportunity to come into the classroom to make a book and read with their child.

Project Action Plan

Literacy bags, containing thematic books at the students' reading level, will be sent home daily. Each student will receive a literacy bag once every six days.

Week 1 (January 21 – 25)

Unit of Study – Sea Life

Throughout the week, the Observational Survey by Marie Clay and the Record of Oral Language by Marie Clay will be given to assess the literacy skills of each student.

Tuesday

Students will be introduced to some of the animals that live in the ocean through making an Ocean Alphabet Chart. It will be done as a whole class activity where students will have the opportunity to tell things that they might already know about some of these animals and ask any questions that they might have. The chart will then be displayed in the classroom for students to reference and add to throughout the entire sea life unit. A Parent Questionnaire will be sent home to get information about each family's reading habits.

Wednesday

Read the story <u>One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish</u> by Dr. Seuss to the whole class. Students can repeat and listen for the rhyming words in the story.

Thursday

Re read <u>One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish</u>. Encourage children to read along and possibly say parts of the story on their own. We would really "play" with the language in the story.

Friday

Whole class will play Ocean Bingo. Students will become more familiar with the ocean animals as we talk about them while we play the game. There will also be a focus on having children tell what letter the animals' name begins with.

Week 2 (January 28 –February 1)

Unit of Study – Sea Life

Monday

Read the story The Rainbow Fish by Marcus Pfister. Children will discuss how the fish feel throughout the story, and then relate it to how our friends feel when we won't share something with them.

Tuesday

In the Dramatic Play center students will have the opportunity to act out the story of The Rainbow Fish. They will be interacting with other students to either retell the story or to make up a new story about the rainbow fish.

In small groups (3-4 students) we will play the game "I'm Going to the Beach and I would like to bring a .....". Students will need to explain what they would bring and why and then also remember what other students said they would bring.

Wednesday

The puppet theatre would again be set up for students to retell The Rainbow Fish.

Thursday

Play Ocean Bingo as a whole class. The focus will be on students saying the names of the animals and phonemic awareness as students repeat the name to listen for the sounds they hear.

Week 3 (February 4 – 8)

Unit of Study – Sea Life

Monday

Teach students the song "Down by the Bay" by Raffi. Students will listen for the rhymes and make up some silly ones of their own.

Tuesday

Continue singing the song "Down by the Bay".

Read the story Froggy Learns to Swim by Jonathan London. Focus will be on the language play when Froggy's mother and father call to him and the sounds that Froggy makes as he is learning to swim.

Wednesday

Parent letter about reading strategies that they can use with their children will go home. (Appendix C)

Thursday

Students in small groups will play Go Fish during center time. This will help students to work on questioning skills.

Friday

Send home recipe for sandy beach toast. (Appendix E)

Week 4 (February 11 – 15)

Unit of Study – Sea Life

Wednesday

Students will again play "Go Fish" in small groups.

As a whole class we will play "I'm thinking of a sea animal who……". Students will have to give clues to their classmates and then try to guess what animal they were thinking about.

Thursday

Read the Story Swim Polar Bear Swim by Joan Stimson. Discuss how the polar bear feels throughout the story. Encourage students to talk about a time when they were afraid.

Friday

Play Ocean Animal Memory Game in small groups. Students one at a time turn over 2 cards to see if they get a match. This will encourage social talk.

Week 5 (February 18 – 22)

Unit of Study – Sea Life

Monday

In whole group play the game "If I wasn't me, I'd like to be…….". Students fill in the blank and then have to tell why they chose that sea animal.

Tuesday

Parent Reading Night at School. All parents are invited to school, where they will have the opportunity to make a book with their child and then to spend some time having their child read some of the stories that we have in our classroom. (Appendix D)

Wednesday

Read the story Little Walrus Warning by Carol Young. Students will discuss how the walrus feels throughout the story.

Thursday

Read the story Cuddly Duddly by Jez Alborough. Focus will be on the rhyming words in the story. Students will be asked to read along with phrases that reoccur throughout the story.

Friday

Play Ocean Bingo Whole Class.

Week 6 (February 25 – March 1)

Unit of Study – Farm

Monday

Begin class farm alphabet book. This will help students become more familiar with animals that live on the farm.

The dramatic play center will contain farm animal puppets that students can use to tell stories.

Tuesday

Read the story Inside a Barn in the Country by Alyssa Capucilli. This story is a rebus story that will also be made into a pocket chart for students to re-read both in centers and as a whole group.

Wednesday

Re-read as a class, Inside a Barn in the Country. The children should be able to do most of the reading.

Thursday

Read Barnyard Banter by Denise Fleming. This story focuses on the noises that farm animals make. Students will be able to play with the language in the story and make the sounds themselves.

Week 7 (March 4 – 8)

Unit of Study – Farm

Monday

Sing "Old Mac Donald Had a Farm" and act it out with the storytelling kit. Encourage students to think of animals that the song did not mention. The storytelling kit will then remain in the reading center for students to use throughout the remainder of the farm unit.

Tuesday

As a whole class make an animal noises bag. Students take turns pulling a picture of an animal out of a bag and then have to make the sound that animal makes.

Wednesday

Read When the Cows Come Home by David Harrison. Listen for the rhymes in the story.

Thursday

Send home a recipe for dirt cups that students can make with their parents. (Appendix E)

Friday

Repeat the Animal Noises Bag activity.

Week 8 (March 11 – 15)

Unit of Study – Farm

Monday

Read, sing and act out Five Little Ducks, a traditional tale, illustrated by Pamela Paparone.

Tuesday

Re-read the story Five Little Ducks.

Wednesday

Read the story One Duck Stuck by Phyllis Root. Language play will be encouraged to make the sounds the animals make and also to say repeating phrases.

Thursday

Play the game "I'm thinking of an animal....." as a whole class. Students will give clues to their classmates as to what animal they are thinking of and then call on someone to guess the name of the animal.

Friday

Read Silly Sally by Audrey Wood. Focus will be on the rhymes in the story and having children read the repeating phrases.

Week 9 (March 18 – 22)

Unit of Study – Farm

Monday

Sing the song and act out with the storytelling kit "5 Green and Speckled Frogs", an old rhyme. The storytelling kit will then remain in the reading center for students to use.

Wednesday

Sing the song and act out with the storytelling kit" Baa, Baa Black Sheep". The storytelling kit will then remain in the reading center for students to use.

Thursday

As a whole group play the word game where the question is asked "Who knows a farm animal that starts with .....?"

Friday

Send home recipe for Nest Nibblers. (Appendix E)

Week 10 (April 1 – 5)

Unit of Study – Farm

Tuesday

Read the story The Three Little Pigs, a traditional tale.

Wednesday

Students will learn the parts of the three pigs and the wolf and they will be assigned a role for the class play.

Thursday

Students will act out the story The Three Little Pigs.

Friday

Students will talk about and explain what their favorite farm animal is and why.

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effects of the intervention, a parent questionnaire is being sent home to see how much time is spent on parent/child literacy activities in the home. The subject size for this project will be 24 families. These students were chosen through the district kindergarten assessment. The students were given the Observational Survey to assess their literacy skills. Those students exhibiting low literacy skills were then offered the services of the Project Accelerated Literacy Program. The parent questionnaire will be sent home on Monday, January 21, 2002. The researchers will ask to have it returned by Monday, January 28, 2002. It will be sent home in the student's backpack and returned in the same manner. All responses will be anonymous; however, the questionnaires will be numbered so that the researchers will know who has returned it.

The Observational Survey by Marie Clay (1993) will be the second method used to assess the literacy skills of 24 kindergarten students. This is a traditional assessment, mandated by the district, given to all kindergarten students. The students will be tested two times during the second semester; January and April. Students will work one on one with the teacher when being tested. The literacy skills that will be assessed are: Letter Identification, Word Test, Concepts about Print, Writing

Vocabulary, Dictation Test and Reading Level. Scores will be calculated to show student's progress throughout the semester. (Appendix B)

The third method of assessment, The Record of Oral Language (Marie Clay, 1983) will be used to assess the written and spoken language structures that students can successfully handle. This is a traditional assessment approved by the district. The students will be tested in January and at the end of April. Students work one on one with the teacher repeating sentences. Scores will be calculated to the show students' progress. (Appendix C)

The final method of assessment is an observation on time spent off task during independent reading. Twenty- four kindergarten students will be observed during a 10-minute period when they are reading independently. The observers will be counting how many times they display off task behaviors. This includes walking around the room, talking to other children, and not looking at their books. This observation will be done in January and April. (Appendix D)

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this project was to increase literacy skills in at-risk kindergarten students. The implementation of oral language activities, and increased parental involvement were selected to effect the desired changes.

For purposes of accounting events in the classroom, the researchers will be switching to the first person. During the intervention period, one student from School A moved so the baseline number is now eleven students. The intervention period lasted eight weeks and was based on the school calendar. Some weeks children did not attend school all five days accounting for days with no intervention.

Oral language activities were used to introduce units of study and to expose students to book language. Activities were done both in whole and small guided groups. Flexible grouping techniques were used based on student need.

In order to increase parental involvement in each child's literacy development, opportunities to participate in home and school activities were provided.

During the first week of implementation pre-testing was started and a parent literacy questionnaire was sent home. Students were introduced to the sea life unit vocabulary through an ocean alphabet chart. We were surprised with the number of students who had not had any experience with ocean animals. Literacy bags were

sent home on a daily basis with two students. The literacy bags were ongoing throughout the eight-week intervention period.

Week two included finishing up the testing, which was very time consuming. The students were getting more familiar with some of the ocean animals that we had read about. We read the story The Rainbow Fish by Marcus Pfister and a puppet theatre was set up in the dramatic play center. It was interesting to see that the students who have low oral language skills had a more difficult time reenacting the story.

Throughout the next two weeks we focused on a variety of oral language activities including responding to stories, rhyming, and playing games in which questioning skills are stressed. A parent letter was sent home with a number of reading activities that families could do together at home. We received positive feedback from a couple of parents saying they found it to be helpful.

A Family Reading Night for both schools was held however the turnout was disappointing. Only 7 out of 24 families attended. Activities included parent/child bookmaking and books that could be read independently by the student or with a parent were available. The families that did attend said they really enjoyed the evening and the students were excited to show their families our classroom.

In week six we began a new unit of study, Farm life. The children appeared excited about starting a new theme. The students seemed to have more background knowledge about the farm animals than they did for the sea life unit. As a class we made a Farm Alphabet Book to use as a point of reference when we were reading and writing about the animals and different things on the farm.

This unit easily lends itself to oral language because of the student knowledge of animal sounds and the language-rich books available. The students quickly found a couple of stories they delighted in, reading them over and over in the reading center. They enjoyed the story 5 Little Ducks, an old tale, so much they asked if we could make it into a book, illustrate it, and take it home to share with their families. We played guessing games with the whole class in which questioning strategies were modeled and practiced. The students had a chance to reenact the story of the Three Little Pigs in the dramatic play center. Students lead discussions and interactions were encouraged. We took on the role of facilitator, encouraging all students to participate in discussions about stories we read together.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

In order to assess written and spoken language structures that students are successfully able to handle, students were administered the Record of Oral Language test by Marie Clay (1983). The data is presented in Figures 7 and 8.

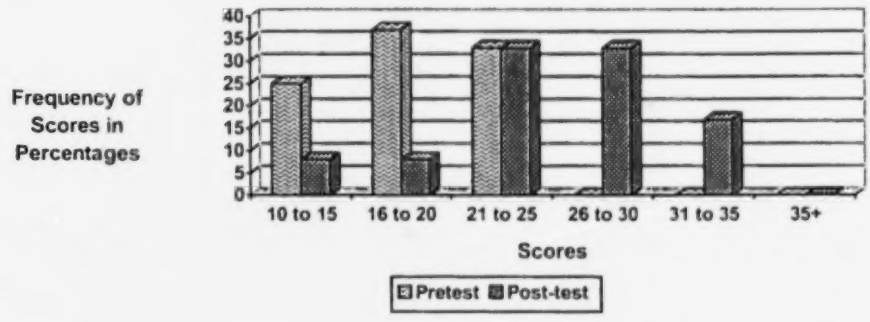

Figure 7 Record of Oral Language Test School A, Pre and Post Data, April 2002

At school A, as shown in Figure 7, this intervention appears to have had a positive effect on students' oral language skills. Previously 25% of students were at warning level and no students received a score above 25. After intervention only 8% were at warning level and 50% of students scored 26 and above.

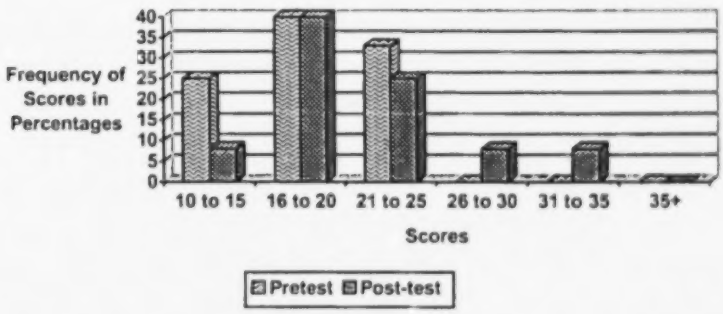

Figure 8 Record of Oral Language Test School B, Pre and Post Data, April 2002

Twenty-five percent of students at School B were at warning level before intervention, as shown in Figure 8. There were no scores above 25. After intervention only 8% were at warning level and 16% scored 26 and above.

Students were administered the Observational Survey by Marie Clay (1993) to assess letter identification (LID), words known in reading (WT), concepts about print (CAP), words known in writing (WV), hearing sounds in words (DIC) and reading levels (RL).

Table 5

Observational Survey School A, May 2002

Student	Pre LID	Post LID	Pre WT	Post WT	Pre CAP	Post CAP	Pre WV	Post WV	Pre DIC	Post DIC	Pre RL	Post RL
1	49	54	0	10	13	14	15	43	9	33	2	4
2	42	48	0	6	11	13	7	35	6	24	1	3
3	1	46	0	2	5	12	1	28	0	25	A	2
4	45		0		7		5		2		1	
5	53	48	1	2	15	9	14	17	15	21	1	A
6	30	52	0	10	13	18	5	29	2	29	B	5
7	18	45	0	1	10	13	4	17	1	15	1	2
8	53	47	3	2	10	13	14	18	20	21	B	2
9	49	54	0	10	13	12	8	37	5	32	B	3
10	50	53	1	3	14	15	18	29	6	24	B	3
11	28	53	0	5	10	11	7	29	1	30	1	3
12	53	48	1	1	12	12	10	15	16	16	1	1
Average	39.25	49.8	0.5	4.7	11.08	12.9	9	27	6.92	24.5		

The results from School A are shown in Table 5. Letter identification (upper and lower case, book a and book g) rose from 39 to 50. This shows an average increase in identification of eleven letters. Of all areas assessed, students showed the most improvement in their writing. Writing vocabulary rose from an average of 9 words per student to 27 words, indicating a 300% increase. The number of sounds students could

hear in words increased from 7 to 25. This was an increase of 360%. Ten of eleven students showed an improvement in their reading levels.

Table 6

Observation Survey School B, May 2002.

Student	Pre LID	Post LID	Pre WT	Post WT	Pre CAP	Post CAP	Pre WV	Post WV	Pre DIC	Post DIC	Pre RL	Post RL
13	17	43	0	1	9	8	2	6	0	5	A	A
14	47	50	0	8	14	15	9	33	5	29	A	5
15	52	53	3	9	14	14	16	48	15	29	A	5
16	52	53	6	18	15	14	29	69	22	33	3	6+
17	17	33	0	0	6	8	3	3	1	3	A	A
18	45	52	0	5	10	13	7	45	6	31	A	3
19	45	50	0	6	14	15	7	25	8	24	A	B
20	41	49	0	3	7	11	10	18	2	18	A	A
21	43	48	0	5	10	12	3	24	5	20	A	A
22	50	54	0	7	11	18	7	40	3	31	A	5
23	50	51	0	5	9	13	4	24	9	29	A	1
24	51	51	3	10	14	19	17	59	21	32	2	6+
Average	42.5	48.9	1	6.4	11.1	13.3	9.5	32.8	8.1	23.7		

The results from School B are shown in Table 6, indicate an increase in the average number of letters known from 42 to 49. The number of words recognized on the word test increased from an average of one word known to six. The areas of writing showed the most student growth. Writing vocabulary rose from an average of 10 words per student to 33, indicating a 300% increase. The average number of sounds students

could hear in words increased from 9 to 24, indicating a 266% increase. Eight out of twelve students made improvements in their reading levels.

Table 7

Observation of Off Task Behaviors School A, April 30, 2002

Behavior Category	Number of Incidents January	Number of Incidents April
Walking around the room	2	7
Talking to other children	18	15
Not looking at their books	23	1

As shown in Table 7, as students at School A gained independence in reading, their off-task behaviors during a 10 minute individual reading time decreased. The total number of off task behaviors decreased from 43 incidents to 23 incidents.

Table 8

Observation of Off Task Behaviors School B, April 30, 2002

Behavior Category	Number of Incidents January	Number of Incidents April
Walking around the room	9	3
Talking to other children	21	11
Not looking at their books	23	2

At School B, as shown in Table 8, the total number of off task behaviors decreased from 53 to 16 during a ten-minute independent reading time. During this

time, more positive student reading behaviors were observed. Students were attending to their books, matching spoken word with print and using pictures, as clues, to read.

Implications for Teaching

We discovered the interventions used were easily adapted into daily lessons. When students were able to use expressive language they could better communicate their thoughts and ideas. Students were also able to handle and understand more complicated "book language".

Increasing parental involvement proved to be more difficult because it included an outside factor, the parents themselves. We had a disappointing turnout when we invited them to come to school and although many ideas and suggestions were sent home, we could not control who actually read and put them into practice.

Overall, this proved to be a very successful intervention and one that was enjoyable to implement. In the future, we will implement these intervention strategies because of their success.

Recommendations

Our recommendations to other researchers are to provide more incentives to increase parental participation in classroom activities. Based on the students' improvements the eight-week intervention period seemed appropriate.

Conclusion

Based on the pre and post assessment data, the students showed significant improvement in their literacy skills. The combination of increased parental involvement and oral language activities provided the support students needed to be successful in

independent reading and writing activities. We found students to be more actively engaged while in literacy centers. The amount of teacher assistance needed by students decreased as they gained more independence. These intervention strategies should be a part of daily classroom instruction. The benefit for children is tremendous.

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Appendices

Appendix A
Home-School Questionnaire

January 8, 2002

Dear Parents,

As you are aware, home –school communication plays an important role in student success. We are asking you to please fill out the attached questionnaire regarding your family's reading habits. Please answer the questions honestly. All responses will be anonymous.

We are asking that you return the questionnaire (without your child's name on it) back to school in his/her backpack by Monday, January 15, 2002. Each child who returns the questionnaire on time will receive a small award.

Thank you in advance for your help.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Dawson

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Home – School Literacy Questionnaire

1. How much time on average do you spend reading with your child each week?

2. Do you discuss the story with your child when you finish reading it?

3. Does your child have access to a wide variety of children's literature at home?

4. How often do you and your child visit the library?

5. How much time do you spend reading at home (books, magazines, and newspapers) in front of your child?

6. How much time does your child spend on writing activities each week?

7. How much time do you spend per week on other learning activities?

8. What are some of the activities you do with your child?

Appendix B
Off Task Behavior Checklist

Off task Behavior During Independent Reading

	Walking around the room	Talking to other children	Not looking at their books
Student 1			
Student 2			
Student 3			
Student 4			
Student 5			
Student 6			
Student 7			
Student 8			
Student 9			
Student 10			
Student 11			
Student 12			

Off task Behavior During Independent Reading

	Walking around the room	Talking to other children	Not looking at their books
Student 13			
Student14			
Student 15			
Student 16			
Student 17			
Student 18			
Student 19			
Student 20			
Student 21			
Student 22			
Student 23			
Student 24			

Appendix C
Parent Reading Strategies

Dear Parents,

Attached you will find a couple of informational sheets explaining the reading stages that your child is in. They tell you what reading behaviors to look for in your child and what you can expect them to be doing next. On the back there are strategies and activities that you can do with your child to help with the progress of his/her reading. I hope you will find these strategies helpful. If you have any questions on how you can help your child with their reading please let me know.

Mrs. Dawson

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Experimental Reading

In this phase the child has memorized familiar stories and can match some spoken and written words. The reader realizes that the words of print always stay the same and begins pointing to words.

The reader:

- is beginning to match some spoken words with written words
- realizes that the words of print always stay the same and will tell adults if they miss a word or page out when reading
- recognizes some familiar words and letters, especially letters from own name and print they see around them
- is beginning to use words relating to books such as *letter, cover, page*
- has an increasing knowledge of letter names and the links between the letters and the sounds they represent
- uses background knowledge and pictures as an aid to meaning
- attempts to identify some words using the initial letter
- recognizes distinctive words that catch the imagination, e.g. *engine, helicopter, dinosaur*
- focuses entirely on meaning and is not concerned with accuracy
- sees self as a reader and talks about own reading
- knows that the reading of text goes from left to right and generally top to bottom of page

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Experimental Reading
How can I help my child with reading?

- Read to your child whenever you can. Now and again ask a few 'why' questions about the story as you read.
- Help your child to tell stories from pictures in the book.
- Talk about the characters, plot, and settings of stories.
- Discuss information taken from factual books.
- Enroll your child in the local library. Choose books together.
- Talk about reading the newspaper, magazines, and books.
- Encourage your child to try and write his/her own name in books he/she owns.
- Read books of children's poetry with your child.
- Borrow book and tape sets from the library.
- Compare events and people in books with your own lives.
- Talk about the pictures when reading to your child.
- Tell stories and sing songs in the car, at bath time, and at bedtime.
- Take books with you when visiting.
- Draw attention to print on packages, jars, e.g., 'Here is the peanut butter. This says, peanut butter." Point to print.
- Let your child 'read' to you and to anyone who is willing to listen e.g., grandparents, neighbors, and even the cat!
- Encourage the child to join in when reading familiar stores.
- Talk about everyday print. Discuss advertisements and talk about the effect they have on you.
- Point out interesting or long words in books.
- Accept your child's efforts without criticism. Always encourage and praise his or her efforts.
- Print your child's name while the child watches when labeling lunch box, etc.
- Read birthday cards with your child, pointing to the words.
- Write shopping lists in front of your child and talk about what your are doing.
- Set up a home message board and write a message everyday, e.g., 'Today we are going to Grandma's.'
- Leave plenty of scrap paper, pencils, and crayons on the child's table or desk. Give him/her old diaries or inexpensive notebooks.
- Encourage your child to find words that begin with the same letter as his/her name.
- Recognize letters on car license plates.
- Watch and talk about television with your child.
- Encourage your child to look at the title and cover of a book and guess what it may be about.
- Encourage your child to tell the story from the pictures in the book.

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Early Reading

In this phase children may read slowly and deliberately as they try to read exactly what is on the page, rather than concentrate on the meaning. They are beginning to realize that it is good to comment on books they have read or listened to.

The reader:

- can read some common words in a variety of situations, e.g., in a book, on a sign, on a card
- retells events in a story with a high degree of accuracy and details. Talk about characters, settings and events, comparing them with own experiences
- may read word-by-word when reading unfamiliar books. Fluency and expression become stilted as the child focuses on sounding out words
- relies heavily on the beginning letters when sounding out words
- relies on sounding out for word identification and may lose the important strategies of taking risks and having a go
- sometimes guesses words make sense when reading and reads on effectively when not interrupted
- if prompted, will re-read in order to clarify meaning that has been lost due to word-by-word reading
- is beginning to correct own reading spontaneously, but loses confidence to do this if constantly corrected by adult
- points as an aid to reading
- talks about text being written by authors
- can identify and talk about different forms of texts e.g., recipes, lists, letters, newspaper articles
- reads familiar texts confidently but may lose fluency when reading unfamiliar texts

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Early Reading

How can I help my child with reading?

- Continue to read to your child every day. Vary the type of books read, e.g., short stories, poems, or serialize long stories.
- Emphasize with your child the importance of making sense from their reading. Encourage them to take risks and 'have a go' at a word.
- De-emphasize the need to get 100% accuracy and try strategies other than sounding out.
- When reading to your child stop sometimes and ask 'What do you think might happen next?' Accept the child's answers even thought they may not seem right.
- Occasionally ask some 'why' questions about the story, e.g., 'Why do you think the author put that part in the story?'
- Talk about books your child has read at school.
- Take your child to the local library regularly and to any story telling session that are advertised.
- Buy books as presents to commemorate special occasions.
- Talk about the things you read-newspapers, magazines, books etc.
- Browse together in book shops.
- Discuss and point out how to locate particular books in book shops e.g., travel books, cooking books, computer text.
- Talk about books you are reading together. Compare characters with real people.
- Accept your child's efforts with praise; concentrate on all the things he/she does right, not on the few errors.
- Have plenty of scrap paper, pencils, felt pens, and crayons on the child's table or desk. Give a diary, birthday book, or notebook for Christmas.
- Talk about illustrations to see if they match what is in the child's or your mind.
- Leave notes around the house or under your child's pillow.
- Point out the author's name before reading a book and encourage your child to read other books by that author.
- If your child makes a mistake when he or she is reading aloud, allow time for self-correction. If the mistake makes sense, ignore it.
- Encourage your child to write messages to other family members.
- Encourage your child to write letters, postcards, lists, and messages. Accept spelling mistakes.
- Encourage your child to make birthday, Christmas, and Easter cards, and birthday invitations. Children can write their own greeting verses.
- Buy your child games that provide simple instructions to read and follow. Play word games.
- Look at the TV guide together and choose a program to watch.
- Encourage your child to make up plays for the family, acting out stories. Some children like to write simple scripts and to draw up a plan for other children to follow.
- Share letters and postcards from friends with the whole family.
- Encourage your child to keep a diary or journal when you go on holidays. This is particularly valuable if you are traveling and your child is missing school.
- Play license plate games in the car, e.g., 'silly sentence'—FCF could be 'Fat Cows Flying.'
- Encourage children to retell stories. Involve the family in swapping stories, e.g., 'I'll tell you a story if you tell me one.'

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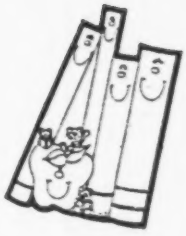
Appendix D
Parent Reading Night Invitation

You Are Invited To Join Us



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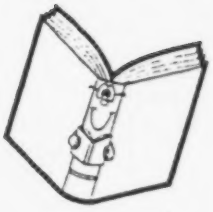
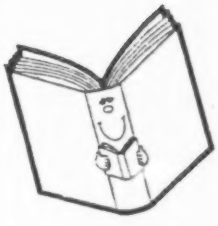


Family Reading Night!

When? Tuesday, February 19th
from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m.

Where? Parkwood School in the
Pal Classroom



Why? To Have Some Fun!

There will be a bookmaking activity for you to work on with your child and tons of books to read!

Appendix E
Unit Recipes

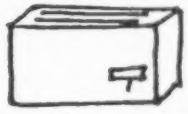
Sandy Beach Toast

Ingredients and materials needed:

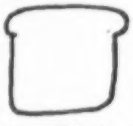
bread (1 slice per child)
paper plate for each child
peanut butter
vanilla wafer
candy pieces for shells (Skittles, M & M's, etc.)
plastic knife/craft stick or tongue depressor for spreading peanut butter
toaster

Teacher Preparation: bring toaster

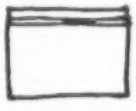
1. Toast bread (teacher or adult supervised)



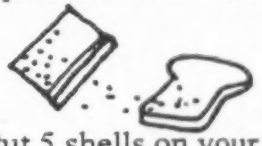
2. Spread peanut butter on bread.



3. Crush 3 vanilla wafers in a Ziploc bag.



4. Sprinkle vanilla wafers on toast. This is the sand.



5. Put 5 shells on your beach.

6. Eat! Yummmmm!

Pictures for task cards/pocket chart are on the following page.

DIRT CUPS

Ingredients and Materials needed:

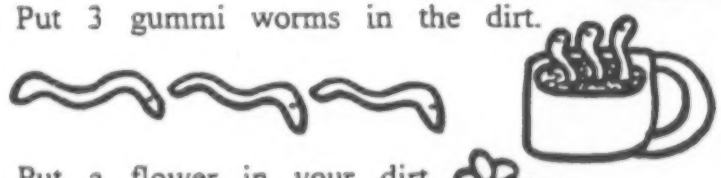
paper cups
plastic flowers (optional)
spoons
chocolate cream sandwich cookies
gummi worms
5 - 4 oz. Boxes of chocolate pudding mix

Teacher preparation: Crush cookie. Mix pudding.

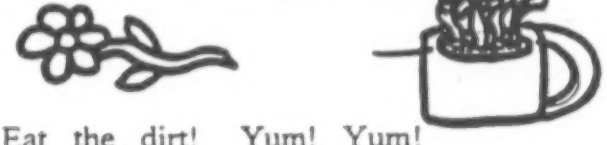
1. Put 4 spoons of pudding in a cup.

2. Put 2 spoons of dirt in a cup.

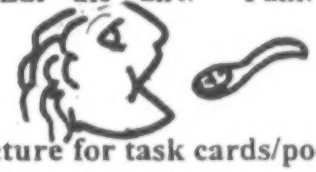
3. Put 3 gummi worms in the dirt.



4. Put a flower in your dirt.



5. Eat the dirt! Yum! Yum!



Picture for task cards/pocket chart are on the following page.

NEST NIBBLERS

Ingredients and Materials needed:

vanilla wafers (1- 16 oz. Box)
canned chocolate frosting
2 cups coconut
green food coloring
miniature jelly beans

Teacher preparation: Put coconut in ziplock bag with drops of green food coloring. Shake bag to make coconut green.

1. Spread some frosting on vanilla wafer.

2. Sprinkle green coconut on frosting.

3. Put 3-4 jelly beans on nest.

4. Eat. Yum! Yum!

Picture task cards/pocket chart on following page.

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